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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire survey of elementary teachers and principals investigated their attitudes toward parent involvement in schools and sought to find whether barriers to parent involvemnt were related to school policies and procedures, teacher or principal attitudes, lack of resources, or lack of knowledge or skills. Of the random sample of 2,000 teachers and 1,500 principals--located in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas--45 percent responded. Attitudinal data were collected on parent involvement in 20 educational decisions and 7 specific involvement roles and on the extent of current parent involvement in 28 specific school decisions. Data analysis was performed using frequencies, averages, and Likert-scale ratings of items. The results show both teachers and principals favor parent involvement in helping their children with school work and in playing support roles for school activities, but do not favor involvemnt in curriculum and instruction decisions or school administration and governance. The results suggest school policies and procedures, as well as teacher and principal attitudes, are not barriers for favored types of parent involvement but may be barriers for nonfavored types of involvement. (RW)

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IDENTIFYING BARRIERS TO PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS: A SURVEY OF EDUCATORS

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for Presentation at the

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INTRODUCTION

Since the mid 1960's the topic of parent involvement in education has received increasing attention in the educational literature. Various authors have described parent involvement as parents participating in school social functions, parents involved in home tutoring, parents assisting classroom teachers, parents choosing the curriculum and materials, or parents serving on school advisory committees. Often these authors describe the successful implementation of one of these parent involvement activities in a community and conclude by saying that parent involvement has enriched the relationship between parents and the school.

In the studies which have focused upon the actual effects of parent involvement, one of two approaches is usually taken: either the researcher selects one specific activity which could be called parent involvement (such as home tutoring) and looks at the impact of this activity on parents, teachers and children; or the researcher looks at the impact of a specific program (such as parent volunteers) which may have involved parents in a variety of ways.

In spite of the fact that most of the published articles and studies conclude that parent involvement is a worthwhile endeavor, it has not become a widely accepted

practice in the schools. This has led a number of researchers to begin examining the barriers to parent involvement. Some of the parent involvement barriers which are commonly cited are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Barriers to Parent Involvement

Teachers' time is limited by their other duties.

Parents are often not interested in being more involved.

Some teachers may feel threatened by parents.

Parents opinions are not taken seriously.

Teachers lack the communication skills to deal with parents.

The school administration does not welcome parent involvement.

Parents are often not sure how to get involved.

Teachers see parents as untrained for educational decisions.

Parents may feel inadequate in the school setting.

School policies do not allocate time for working with parents.

Parents often do not have time due to working.

Teachers do not consider work with parents as part of their job.

Parents think teachers probably know what is best for their child.

Parents are reluctant to confront their children's teachers.

Teachers do not ask parents to become involved.

Issues Involved in Identifying Barriers

An examination of the barriers listed in Table 1 shows that the identification of barriers depends to a great extent on whom you ask. Parents may see teachers as the problem, teachers may see parents as the problem, and both of them may cite school policies or the school administration as the problem. Therefore, any systematic attempt to identify barriers to parent involvement should either specify the group being asked, or preferably, should ask each of the groups affected by parent involvement.

Another issue which becomes clear as one studies Table 1 is that some of the barriers cited relate to a single type of parent involvement activity, while other barriers seem related to parent involvement in general. Therefore, it seems that a systematic attempt to identify parent involvement barriers should either select a specific type of parent involvement to study or should look at the specific barriers to implementing each of the specific types of parent involvement in the literature.

A third issue to be considered is that there are several types of barriers to parent involvement. First of all, there are policies and procedures which may either encourage or discourage parent involvement activities on the part of both parents and teachers. Secondly, there may be

attitudes on the part of either teachers or parents which constitute barriers toward working with each other. There may be a lack of resources which become barriers to parent involvement. These would include primarily time and money from both parents and teachers. Finally, there may be a lack of knowledge or skills on the part of either parents or teachers which serve as barriers to parent involvement.

A Survey of Teachers and Principals on Parent Involvement

The Southwest Parent Education Resource Center (CENTER) completed a survey of elementary school teachers and principals in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Although the purpose of the study was to define current practices in addition to identifying possible barriers, the study was designed to address the issues presented in the previous section. The survey was sent to both teachers and principals to ensure that the data did not simply reflect the views of a single interest group. In addition, the survey presented both groups of respondents with a broad range of parent involvement activities so they could give their responses to each one.

They were asked for their opinions about parent involvement in general, but they were also asked about the value of involving parents in specific school decisions.

They were asked to indicate whether 7 specific parent involvement roles were useful to the schools. Then they were asked to examine a list of 28 parent involvement activities and to indicate the extent to which each activity was typical of parent involvement in their own school.

One objective of this survey was to get teachers and administrators in the field to define what they saw as the proper role for parents in the schools, then to determine whether or not parents in their respective schools were adopting this role.

Another objective of this survey was to determine whether the barriers to specific parent involvement activities had to do with school policies and procedures, attitudes of teachers or principals, lack of resources or a lack of knowledge or skills.

METHOD

Instrument

The Parent Involvement Questionnaire (PIQ) was developed and used as the data gathering instrument for this survey effort. Many of the items on this survey were derived from the conceptualization of parent involvement of Safran (1979). Safran conceptualized parent involvement as varying along a dimension of power sharing, so that certain parent activities involved little power sharing, (signing report

cards, baking brownies, etc.) while other parent activities involved greater power sharing in school decisions (serving on advisory committees, being an advocate for their child, serving on the school board). Safran felt that parents should be increasingly involved in the educational decisions affecting their children, and that teachers should be trained to work more effectively with parents as well as to teach children in the classroom.

The survey instrument asked principals and teachers their opinions about whether parents, teachers or administrators should initiate parent involvement activities. They were also asked to indicate which school decisions could best use input from parents, which parent involvement roles were most beneficial to the school, and which parent involvement activities were current practices in their school. Respondents were also asked to indicate ethnic background, gender, years of experience, and other demographic information.

Sample

The CENTER contracted with a market data retrieval firm to identify the population of elementary school teachers and principals in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. They were able to provide names and current addresses for approximately 85% of the elementary

school teachers in each state and over 90% of the principals. From these lists, a random sample of 2000 elementary school teachers was selected to participate in the survey. A random sample of 1500 principals was also selected to participate in the survey of principals. Representation from each state was approximately proportional to the population of that state.

Data Collection

The survey instrument was sent to approximately 1,500 principals and 2,000 teachers in elementary schools. Of those who received the questionnaire, approximately 45% completed and returned it. These educators were all located in the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The number from each state was proportional to state population.

Data Analysis

The data were first analyzed to (1) generate an overall picture of responses to the survey, (2) obtain a composite description of respondent characteristics, and (3) plan for subsequent or secondary analyses. The first analysis involved generating descriptive statistics for all items on the survey questionnaire. The distribution of responses and a description of central tendency were described by the range of responses, the frequency of different responses,

the mean response and the standard deviation. Missing data were not included in the calculations of central tendency.

Results of the first analysis were used to get an overall picture of responses to the survey, to get a composite description of the respondents' characteristics, and to plan subsequent analyses. Tables were prepared to show the mean ratings for items in each section of the survey questionnaire. A summary of the characteristics of the respondents returning this survey was also prepared.

The mean ratings were used to rank the items in each section of the survey to identify those items receiving the strongest positive or negative ratings. Tables were prepared to show those items receiving the strongest response in each section of the survey in rank order. Responses to the items were broken out by each of 7 demographic variables to determine whether the variation in response might be systematically related to some factor such as ethnic background or years of experience.

RESULTS

Results of data analyses suggest a consensus among educators surveyed about certain aspects of parent involvement. These areas of consensus represent the topic areas which afford the greatest possibility of home school collaboration. In contrast, there are certain aspects of parent involvement which respondents did not support or upon which the two groups of respondents did not agree. The absence of consensus in these areas make it unlikely that they could be the focus of successful colaborative efforts. Instead, these aspects of parent involvement seem to call for additional consensus building before they can be included in collaborative efforts.

Attitudes Toward Parent Involvement in Education

Both principals and teachers expressed positive feelings about parents in general. They agreed with statements that parents were usually cooperative, that parents were capable of making rational decisions about their children when they had adequate information, and that parents usually know what is best for their children (see Table 2). They agreed that parents should help children with their homework and that more parents would help children at home if they knew what to do. They also agreed that parent participation in all school matters should be increased and that stronger efforts should be made to include parents on curriculum development committees.

TABLE 2
TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS
AGREED WITH THESE STATEMENTS
ABOUT PARENTS

Parents are usually cooperative with teachers.

Parents usually know what is best for their elementary school age children.

When given adequate information about their children, parents can make rational decisions.

Parent participation in all school related matters should be increased.

Stronger efforts should be made to include parents on curriculum development boards.

More parents would help children at home if they knew what to do.

Having parents help their children with homework is a good idea.

In summary, these responses indicated a favorable attitude toward parents and toward the general idea of involving them in education, whether it pertains to their own child or to their child's school.

This apparent consensus between teachers and principals was clarified by looking at responses to items which specified definitions of parent involvement. Teachers and principals were presented with a list of decisions which are commonly made by teachers and administrators in the schools. They were asked to indicate the extent to which parent input would be helpful in making each decision.

Teacher ratings of the usefulness of parent input were very similar to those of principals (see Table 3). Parent input was seen as most useful in areas related to family problems, placing their child in special education, sex education, amount of homework assigned and developing integration plans (see Table 4). Parent input was seen as least useful in administrative decisions such as making assignments of teachers to classrooms, evaluating teacher performance, hiring or firing school staff, or deciding budget priorities for the school. They also saw parent input as not useful in selecting teaching methods at the school (see Table 5).

TABLE 3
COMPARISON OF TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS'
RATINGS OF USEFULNESS INVOLVING
PARENTS IN SCHOOL DECISIONS*

Decisions	Teacher Ratings	Principal Ratings
1. Grouping children for instruction.....	2.325	2.399
2. Amount of homework assigned.....	2.648	2.809
3. Choosing classroom discipline methods.....	2.810	2.767
4. Evaluating pupil performance.....	2.337	2.412
5. Selecting teaching methods.....	1.980	2.040
6. Selecting textbooks and other learning materials...	2.349	2.449
7. Emphasizing affective skills rather than cognitive skills.....	2.430	2.599
8. Placing children in Special Education.....	3.199	3.377
9. Curriculum emphasis on the arts rather than basic skills.....	2.038	2.351
10. Hiring/firing of school staff.....	1.508	1.472
11. Evaluating teacher performance.....	1.947	1.780
12. Deciding priorities for the school budget.....	2.262	2.288
13. Emphasizing multicultural/bilingual education.....	2.368	2.318
14. Setting promotion and retention standards of students.....	2.183	2.326
15. Formulating desegregation/integration plans.....	2.744	2.856
16. Making assignments of teachers within a school.....	1.486	1.426
17. Deciding if family problems are affecting school performance.....	3.884	3.764
18. Setting school discipline guidelines.....	2.760	2.830
19. Providing sex role instruction and sex education...	2.986	2.992
20. Setting guidelines for grading students.....	2.075	2.300

*Using a five-point rating scale from 1 (Not Useful) to 5 (very useful).

TABLE 4
PARENT INPUT WAS SEEN
AS MOST USEFUL IN THESE DECISIONS

Rank		Teachers' Ratings	Principals' Ratings
1.	Deciding if family problems are affecting school performance.....	3.884	3.764
2.	Placing children in Special Education.....	3.199	3.377
3.	Providing sex role instruction and sex education.....	2.986	2.992
4.	Amount of homework assigned.....	2.648	2.809
5.	Formulating desegregation/integration plans.....	2.744	2.856

TABLE 5
PARENT INPUT WAS SEEN
AS LEAST USEFUL IN THESE DECISIONS

Rank		Teachers' Ratings	Principals' Ratings
1.	Making assignments of teachers within a school.....	1.486	1.426
2.	Hiring/firing of school staff.....	1.508	1.472
3.	Evaluating teacher performance.....	1.947	1.780
4.	Selecting teaching methods.....	1.980	2.040
5.	Deciding priorities for the school budget.....	2.262	2.288

Another comparison of the responses of principals and teachers revealed that teachers tended to see parent input as more useful in decisions which were usually made by by principals, and that principals also gave parent input higher ratings for decisions usually made by teachers (see Tables 6 and 7).

Responses to Specific Parent Involvement Roles

In an effort to identify specific aspects of parent involvement which were seen as most useful by educators, teachers and principals were presented with 7 parent involvement roles and were asked to indicate how important it was for schools to have parents in each role. Again, the responses of teachers and principals were very similar. As shown in Table 8, both groups favored parents being involved as an audience for school activities, as supporters of school programs and as home tutors with their children. They also gave their lowest ratings to having parents involved as decision makers, as advocates, or as paid school staff.

These responses tend to confirm the previous results which suggest that principals and teachers favor the idea of parent involvement in education if it means helping children with homework or supporting school activities. However, there seems to be significantly less support for parent

TABLE 6
USEFULNESS OF PARENT INPUT INTO DECISIONS
USUALLY MADE BY TEACHERS: COMPARISON
OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL VIEWS

Decisions	Teacher Ratings	Principal Ratings
Grouping children for instruction.....	2.325	2.399
Amount of homework assigned.....	2.648	2.809
Choosing classroom discipline methods.....	2.810	2.767
Evaluating pupil performance.....	2.337	2.412
Selecting teaching methods.....	1.980	2.040
Selecting textbooks and other learning materials..	2.349	2.449
Emphasizing affective skills rather than cognitive skills.....	2.430	2.599

TABLE 7
USEFULNESS OF PARENT INPUT INTO DECISIONS
USUALLY MADE BY PRINCIPALS: COMPARISON
OF TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL VIEWS

Decisions	Teacher Ratings	Principal Ratings
Hiring/firing of school staff.....	1.508	1.472
Evaluating teacher performance.....	1.947	1.780
Setting promotion and retention standards of students.....	2.183	2.326
Formulating desegregation/integration plans.....	2.744	2.856
Making assignments of teachers within a school....	1.486	1.426

TABLE 8
TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' RATINGS
OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT ROLES

Rank	Roles	Teachers' Rating (N=873)	Principals' Rating (N=726)
1.	Audience for school activities (e.g., attending special performances, etc.).....	4.242	4.116
2.	School program supporter (e.g., volunteers for activities, field trip chaperones, etc.).....	4.212	4.094
3.	Home tutor for children (i.e., helping children at home to master school work).....	3.858	3.648
4.	Co-learner (i.e., parents participate in activities where they learn about education with teachers, students and principals).....	3.651	3.589
5.	Paid school staff (e.g., aides, parent educators, assistant teachers, etc.).....	3.202	3.092
6.	Advocate (i.e., activist role regarding school policies and community issues).....	3.104	3.120
7.	Decision-maker (i.e., partners in school planning, curriculum or administrative decisions).....	2.407	2.609

involvement in education if it means having parents involved in decisions which have traditionally belonged to professional educators.

Current Practices in Parent Involvement

In the survey instrument, teachers and principals were each asked to look at 28 specific parent involvement activities and to indicate the extent to which each activity was typical of parent involvement in their own school. A 5-point Likert scale was used in which 1=Not Typical and 5=Very Typical. Mean responses to these items are shown in Table 9.

Although the responses of teachers and of principals were again quite similar, they disagreed somewhat about which parent involvement activities were most typical in the schools. Those activities described as most typical by responding teachers included attending open house, chaperoning for school social functions, holding fund raisers to support school needs, attending parent-teacher conferences about children's progress and assisting children with school assignments at home. Principals' ratings agreed with those of teachers, but they tended to give each activity higher ratings suggesting they saw these activities as more typical than did the teachers (see Table 10).

TABLE 9
DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT PARENT INVOLVEMENT
PRACTICES ACCORDING TO TEACHERS
AND PRINCIPALS

	Activities	Teacher Ratings	Principal Ratings
1.	Setting goals with teachers for classroom learning..	1.483	1.845
2.	Assisting children with school assignments at home..	3.238	3.596
3.	Visiting the school to observe in classroom.....	2.286	2.747
4.	Attending open house or "follow-your-children's schedule" activities.....	3.726	4.217
5.	Participating in activities to prepare parents for home tutoring of their children.....	1.887	2.307
6.	Preparing and disseminating parent newsletter.....	2.122	2.453
7.	Holding fund-raisers to support school needs.....	3.621	3.810
8.	Conducting school public relations activities in the community.....	2.619	2.855
9.	Identifying community resources for the school.....	2.568	2.780
10.	Holding social functions at the school (coffees, luncheons, potluck suppers, etc.).....	2.602	2.855
11.	Tutoring students at home.....	2.290	2.642
12.	Assisting teachers with classroom learning activities.....	2.102	2.629
13.	Assisting in school resource areas, playgrounds, and health facilities.....	2.083	2.437
14.	Chaperoning for school field trips, picnics, parties, etc.....	3.714	3.853
15.	Helping with the improvement of school facilities and the classroom learning environment.....	2.494	2.803

*Using a five-point scale from 1 (Not Typical) to 5 (Very Typical).

TABLE 9 (continued)

	Activities	Teacher Ratings	Principal Ratings
16.	Providing clerical assistance to teachers.....	1.828	2.277
17.	Participating in parent-teacher inservice activities at school.....	1.915	2.331
18.	Attending parent-teacher educational meetings or conferences away from school.....	1.807	2.136
19.	Participation in school budget planning.....	1.553	1.570
20.	Participating in curriculum development.....	1.493	1.782
21.	Assisting in establishment of school's educational goals.....	1.594	2.114
22.	Participation in evaluation of school programs and instruction.....	1.616	2.008
23.	Participation in evaluation of school staff.....	1.323	1.439
24.	Participation in evaluation of students.....	1.400	1.557
25.	Participation in decisions about hiring/ firing of school staff.....	1.213	1.264
26.	Identifying needs and problem areas of the school...	2.127	2.586
27.	Initiating policy changes for the school or school district.....	1.683	2.086
28.	Attending parent-teacher conferences about children's progress.....	3.606	3.976

TABLE 10
TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' RATINGS
OF MOST TYPICAL PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Item	Activities	Teachers' Ratings (N=873)	Principals' Ratings (N=726)
(4)	Attending open house or "follow-your-children's schedule" activities.....	3.726	4.217
(28)	Attending parent/teacher conferences about children's progress.....	3.606	3.976
(14)	Chaperoning for school field trips, picnics, parties, etc.....	3.621	3.853
(7)	Holding fund-raisers to support school needs at home.....	3.714	3.810
(2)	Assisting children with school assignments at home.....	3.238	3.596

TABLE 11
COMPARISON OF TEACHERS' AND PRINCIPALS' RATINGS
OF LEAST TYPICAL PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Item	Activities	Teachers' Ratings (N=873)	Principals' Ratings (N=726)
(25)	Participation in decisions about hiring/firing of school staff.....	1.213	1.264
(23)	Participation in evaluation of school staff.....	1.323	1.439
(24)	Participation in evaluation of students.....	1.400	1.557
(19)	Participation in school budget planning.....		1.570
(20)	Participation in curriculum development.....	1.493	1.782
(1)	Setting goals for classroom learning.....	1.483	

Those parent involvement activities described as least typical by teachers included participating in hiring/firing decisions about school staff, participating in evaluation of school staff, participating in evaluation of students, setting goals for classroom learning and participating in curriculum development. Principals indicated general agreement with teachers, with the exception that they included parent participation in school budget planning as one of the least typical ways in which parents were involved in their schools (see Table 11).

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

One of the objectives of this project was to determine which aspects of parent involvement educators support in order to identify those areas in which there is a consensus. These areas offer the greatest possibility of collaborative efforts involving parents and educators.

There appears to be a general consensus among teachers, and principals regarding the desirability of having parents become more involved in education. Their responses to the survey indicate that they see parents as cooperative, concerned and competent partners in the educational process. However, the educators responding to the survey expressed a

clear preference for certain types of parent involvement and some reservations about others.

They strongly supported parents being more involved with helping their own children with school work. This type of parent involvement complements the work of the school and most directly impacts the academic success of the child.

They also favored parents becoming more involved in support roles for school activities. This type of parent involvement helps to reduce the extracurricular demands on teachers and emphasizes the fact that the school is a community effort.

They did not favor parents becoming more involved in the curriculum and instruction decisions of the school. Teachers and principals indicated that they were not sure of parents' competence to make these decisions, they did not see this type of parent involvement as useful, and that it was fairly atypical of their schools.

They also did not favor parents becoming more involved in the administration or governance of the schools. This type of parent involvement received the lowest ratings from both groups. Even though a majority of these educators agreed that parent involvement in all school matters should be increased, they also agreed that parents should not be involved in making the decisions which are usually made by principals in the schools.

In summary, these results suggest that parent involvement activities which involve parents in home learning or support roles for school activities are most commonly integrated into existing school policies. These types of parent involvement are also congruent with the attitudes of teachers and principals. For these two types of parent involvement, neither policies and procedures nor the attitudes of teachers and principals could be considered barriers. Barriers to these types of parent involvement are more likely to be related to lack of resources or to lack of knowledge or skills.

If parent involvement is defined as having parents involved in curriculum and instruction decisions, or having them involved in decisions about the administration and governance of the schools, the barriers seem to be more extensive. These types of parent involvement may be in conflict with the policies and procedures as well as the attitudes of teachers and principals. Until these two barriers are overcome, it may not be necessary to determine whether or not there are adequate resources or adequate knowledge and skills to implement these types of parent involvement.

Other Barriers to Parent Involvement

Parent involvement may be conceptualized as either a power struggle or a collaborative relationship between parents and the schools. Collaborative relationships can best succeed when the the following conditions are met:

1. There is a consensus on the issue which is the central focus of the collaborative effort.

2. There is a voluntary relationship where either party is free to terminate at any time.

3. There is a power distribution in which either party has an equal (or almost equal) opportunity to influence the other.

4. There is a climate of trust which facilitates the sharing of information and resources.

5. There is a commitment to making decisions based upon the best information available, to move toward the agreed upon goal.

To the extent that these conditions are not met, they can be considered barriers to any collaborative effort, including parent involvement.

Directions for Further Research

One of the objectives of this project was to determine which aspects of parent involvement educators support in order to begin identifying those areas in which there is a consensus between parents and educators. These areas offer the greatest possibility of collaborative efforts involving parents and the schools.

The CENTER has completed surveying both teachers and principals to determine what educators support in the area of parent involvement. During the current year, the CENTER is conducting a survey about parent involvement directed at parents in the six-state region. Results from this survey will provide important information about parent involvement from the perspective of parents. The results will also serve to identify areas of consensus between parents and educators regarding parent involvement in the schools.

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